



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION
Corporate Citizenship Center

A LESSON PLAN FOR PARTNERSHIPS



INSIGHTS FROM LEADING STEM NONPROFITS

A LESSON PLAN FOR PARTNERSHIPS: INSIGHTS FROM LEADING STEM NONPROFITS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation conducted research to better understand partnerships between corporations and nonprofits. The research, which was conducted through its Corporate Citizenship Center (CCC), looked at a specific set of nonprofit organizations. Each organization works to improve education in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and all received grants from the Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund (i3).

The goal of the research was to discover two things: (1) how leading nonprofits effectively partner with corporations, and (2) how nonprofits measure their success and share it with corporate donors. While STEM nonprofits were chosen for this study, the findings in this paper may apply to other types of nonprofit relationships.

➤ **Nonprofits need to professionalize to the greatest extent possible.** The STEM nonprofits in this study implemented their education programs well, but they struggled with organizational functions like HR, fundraising, and communications. At a minimum, nonprofits should formalize their communications. All nonprofits should be able to succinctly present their program, have an attractive and intuitive website, and have a visual model describing how the program works.

➤ **Nonprofits can better prepare to work with corporate partners.** Nonprofits would benefit by integrating multiple options for corporations to be involved. For instance, corporations in this study engaged STEM nonprofits by serving on advisory boards, contributing skills-based volunteers, donating money, and validating the programs to other organizations.



- **Corporate professionals predominately rely on informal communication channels to learn about the impact their nonprofit partners are making.** In this study, nonprofits and corporations both noted that informal check-ins (as opposed to formal reports) were the major source of communication. This method of communication can make it difficult to quantitatively assess a nonprofit's impact.
- **When nonprofits measure their social impact using scientific methodology, it is difficult for the business community to interpret.** Most corporate professionals do not understand advanced statistical techniques for measuring each kind of social or environmental impact. As nonprofits improve the measurement of their social impact, there is an increasing need for services that translate scientific evidence

into information businesses can use. It is uncertain who will execute this data translation service. The STEM programs in this study did not have the time or resources to translate their findings into a format that the business community could straightforwardly employ.

- **Corporate and nonprofit partnerships seem to be underpublicized.** Of the 26 corporations sponsoring four i3 grantees, CCC found that 10 of them released a public statement announcing their partnership. All 10 announced the corporation's donation; none mentioned the impact resulting from the donation. It appears that corporations are missing out on communicating the value of their impact to the public.

Based on the findings of this report, nonprofit partnerships have room to become more strategic. Even if a company's goal is to "do good," rather than receive material benefit, there is room for making partnerships more effective. One of the chief ways to make partnerships more strategic is to take on an investment mindset. Holding corporate responsibility projects to the same standard as other business investments reveals gaps in planning, execution, and evaluation. When corporate responsibility professionals conceive of their nonprofit partnerships as investments, it raises important questions. For instance: am I getting as good a return on this donation as I would with others? Are there parts of this investment that are not working, and parts that could be cut?

Strengthening nonprofits as partners greatly increases the probability that public-private partnerships will succeed. Likewise, solving overarching social problems requires nonprofits, companies, and governments to work together, and these partnerships are only as strong as their weakest link. STEM education will only be improved if corporations and nonprofits find ways to make their partnerships even more innovative.



INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation convened companies at the forefront of social and environmental issues through its Corporate Citizenship Center (CCC). *A Lesson Plan for Partnerships: Insights From Leading Stem Nonprofits* resulted from two of those meetings: one on strengthening nonprofit partnerships and one on STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).¹

Both meetings produced new questions. In the meeting on strengthening nonprofit partnerships, CCC's supporters wanted to know how nonprofits could better measure "social return on investment" (SROI). Essentially, supporters wanted to better measure the successes of their nonprofit partners, so that they could maximize the impact of their donations. In the STEM education meeting, supporters wanted to

identify the best nonprofit partners because there is an overabundance of nonprofits working on STEM from which to choose. As CCC set out to address these two concerns, it became apparent that partnerships were the key link to both. It also became apparent that a single research project could resolve these partnership uncertainties.²

As a result, this report uses research conducted on STEM nonprofits to answer the questions raised by the two meetings. First, the report examines what makes for great STEM partnerships and presents what other nonprofits can learn from top STEM organizations. Next, the report changes its lens and examines how these same nonprofits communicate their social impact to corporate partners. The latter section examines the relationship between nonprofits and corporations and how this relationship may be developed or improved.



METHODS

This research set out to answer two questions: (1) What makes for the most effective STEM partnerships, and (2) How are the best nonprofits measuring and communicating their social return on investment? Answering these questions required studying nonprofits that combine proven impact in STEM education with best-in-class measurement of that impact. To this end, CCC selected recipients of the Department of Education's \$937 million Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) from 2010 to 2012.

Three features make i3 grant recipients ideal for the twin goals of this project. Recipients of the grant demonstrated proven impact for the following reasons:

- They must produce extensive evidence of their viability. Recipients exhibited best-in-class measurement of their impact.
- The grant requires implementation of randomized control trials and third-party validation of results.
- All recipients must report their impact back to private sponsors, because the i3 grants require 15% - 20% of funding to come from private sources.

To explore the features of i3-awarded organizations, CCC conducted ethnographic interviews in 2013. The interviews were conducted with professionals working at STEM education nonprofits and with professionals at corporations that sponsored these nonprofits. CCC talked with staff from four i3-awarded STEM nonprofits, four STEM nonprofits without i3 funding, and with seven corporate professionals directly responsible for sponsoring the nonprofits. CCC also analyzed the characteristics and impact of dozens of STEM programs, including programs that did not receive an i3 award. Particularly, CCC studied one program from a 360-degree perspective: the *Virginia Initiative for Science Teaching and Achievement* (VISTA). The next section tells the story of VISTA, which serves as a good example of the evolution and structure of a STEM nonprofit.

Throughout this report, some details were changed to protect the anonymity of the respondents. In addition, names of the respondents and companies were removed, except where permission was specifically given. Statements that appear in quotation marks are direct quotes from the respondent.

Details on methods, including interview questionnaires and general conclusions on the structure of STEM nonprofit programs, can be found in Appendix I—Methodology and in Appendix II—Survey Questionnaires at the end of this report.

THE STORY OF VISTA



Based at George Mason University (GMU) in Virginia, VISTA is a statewide

partnership among seven universities, 81 Virginia school districts, the Virginia Department of Education, and a number of private corporate partners. Its goal is to improve STEM education in the state, primarily through teacher development programs. The program, in particular, focuses on providing elementary, middle, and high school teachers with experiences in problem-based teaching and student-centered inquiry.

VISTA accomplishes its mission through two primary programs:

Professional development for elementary school science teachers. Elementary science teachers attend a four-week course

where they learn about problem-based teaching and curriculum development. They practice their newly acquired techniques and receive a follow-up year of in-class coaching by a master science teacher. They also receive financial support for in-class science materials and attend the yearly Virginia Association of Science Teachers Conference.

Graduate-level certification for middle and high school science teachers. Middle and High School teachers receive the support of a master science teacher as a coach for two years, funding for in-class science materials, the opportunity to attend the Virginia Science Teachers Professional Development Institute, and participate in a basic and an advanced science methods course.³

VISTA evaluates its program both qualitatively and quantitatively. It tracks teachers' performance through self-evaluations and videotaped sessions. It tracks student success through statewide testing and their



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own evaluation system. These evaluations compare students who were taught by VISTA-trained teachers with students who were not. Third-party evaluators at Oregon State University monitor the effectiveness of the program. Because control and intervention groups are randomly assigned, the outcomes of the program meet the highest degree of experimental rigor.⁴

VISTA was not always so big or so comprehensive. The remainder of this section covers the program's history to gain a perspective on how STEM nonprofits generally come to exist, and how they form partnerships with corporate sponsors.

The Beginning

VISTA began how many STEM organizations start—it was founded on the work of a visionary who devoted her career to studying and improving education: Dr. Donna Sterling.

Dr. Sterling began her professional life as a research scientist, but soon transitioned to traveling around the world teaching science and math to primary and secondary age children. She built on those experiences when she pivoted her career to develop STEM education more than 15 years ago. At that time, Dr. Sterling began experimenting with new learning systems to help science teachers increase literacy and excitement among students. Along the way, she published numerous peer-reviewed papers and secured increasing institutional and corporate support of her work.

Dr. Sterling's research provided the early cachet and funding for programs that would eventually lead to VISTA. Through her career as a researcher on education, she acquired many grants from the U.S. Department of Education and other sources.

She also acquired prominence in the educational community and a growing body of knowledge on how education programs work. It was her team at GMU who applied for an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant in 2010.

Dr. Sterling's influence pervades VISTA. She is the program lead on the i3 grant. Also, when introducing VISTA to a newcomer, the staff generally starts with her story and the seminal role she played in starting the initiative. In fact, it was quite common to hear from STEM nonprofits that they began with the work of a single visionary—often an academic or educator.

They Get the Grant

Based on strong evidence from Dr. Sterling's body of research, as well as a strong proposal based on her expertise, the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) at GMU received a \$32 million i3 grant in 2010. According to CEHD, this grant was the largest single grant ever received by the University.

At the time, CEHD had a strong educational model in place based on Dr. Sterling's past research. However, there was no preexisting structure to run the massive experiment called for by the grant. Covering 81 school districts and disbursing \$32 million over five years, the project is effectively a medium-size enterprise in the state of Virginia. While research pointed to the best means to educate children in STEM education, other parts of the program were an open question. One looming question was how to raise the \$5.7 million required to meet the i3 matching requirement.

They Need Corporate Donations

CCC spoke with several corporate partners of VISTA about their experiences with the program. These supporters revealed that,

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like most new enterprises, VISTA had some hiccups at the start.

One of the key difficulties came from mismatched language. The researchers at GMU were accustomed to an academic or government audience. Potential corporate donors were not interested in the white papers the university staff kept bringing to meetings. One of the corporate respondents told VISTA to “simply say what you’re looking for.” She felt that the university could not articulate what it needed. Another corporate respondent mentioned that she found that the program’s website was not up to par. In the early stages, she offered suggestions to VISTA to craft a website that would effectively communicate the program to the public and to potential supporters.

VISTA Gets Rob

Perhaps as a consequence of these early difficulties, GMU recognized that a development professional was needed to raise the required matching funds and to improve corporate relations generally. This professional was Rob Johnson. Rob had a background in education development, having worked at Georgetown University’s business school for 20 years.

The corporate respondents spoke highly of Rob, and specifically noted that his presence “turned on the light bulb.” He could succinctly articulate the value and needs of the project in a format that the business community could easily understand. He also worked with academic implementers to craft presentations that fully captured the richness of their research, while keeping the content and length appropriate to business audiences.

Like VISTA, many STEM programs in this study have a development officer. They benefit from a professional who is able to translate

the successes and methods of the program to the needs of each corporate donor.

VISTA Gets its First Major Corporate Sponsor

With time, VISTA got its first major corporate partner. CCC spoke with the professional in charge of the donation to ask her why her company donated to the program. The respondent offered several reasons.

First, her corporation manufactures advanced technology products, and hence has strong ties to science. As a result, STEM education is the major focus of its corporate philanthropic donations. This respondent thought that funding STEM education was a key business need in the state of Virginia, because failing to produce enough students properly educated in science would mean a lack of workers, especially managers and engineers. To underline that STEM education is a business need, the respondent pointed out that she is



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positioned in the business functions of the corporation, not in its foundation.

Second, the corporation has manufacturing facilities and offices located in the state of Virginia. Given this presence, when VISTA “came across [a respondent’s] desk,” she thought it was a good way to maintain positive relations with her employees, consumers, and the state.

Finally, the respondent said that her company provides smaller donations to fund innovative projects early in their history. Akin to a seed funder, her company saw that VISTA had “some meat on the bone” and needed an early champion. After considerable work, she convinced the foundation head and the company board to provide the first major corporate donation.

VISTA Gets More Sponsors

VISTA eventually developed relations with additional major corporate partners that have provided approximately 50% of the required \$5.7 million in funding. CCC also spoke with the professionals in charge of these later donations.

The donors mentioned reasons for giving that were similar to the first donor. One mentioned the ties that her company had to the state of Virginia, and said that she felt her company must help out once such a big program came onto her radar. She felt that failing to do so would be a slight to her company’s employees, consumers, and stakeholders in Virginia. Other reasons cited include: the importance of generating STEM-ready employees, having an executive in the company specifically interested in STEM education, and a desire to see a holistic approach like VISTA delivered. To the last point, one partner was impressed that VISTA

“brought in all of the state universities [in Virginia].” She felt this demonstrated VISTA’s commitment to systemic change in the state’s education system.

Where VISTA is now

As of Fall 2013, VISTA is in the middle of its five-year research project. It is still working to secure corporate donations to meet the i3 matching requirement. Importantly, its first results on student test scores are just being released by the state. Students’ Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) scores will be a big test of how well the program is working. At this time, Rob is working with VISTA’s academic leadership to ensure that it has a plan in place for releasing the research results in a concise, effective, and transparent manner.

Conclusion

Each of the i3 programs is unique and differs with VISTA to varying degrees. None of the programs in this study are quite as large and comprehensive as VISTA. Some of the other programs are more advanced in certain aspects (e.g. some succeeded more quickly with their business relationships). Some work with students outside the classroom; others work with students inside the classroom, where VISTA focuses most strongly on training teachers.

Still, the history of VISTA can be seen as a prototype of a number of i3-awarded nonprofits. Many start with a “cult of personality” around one strong visionary. Many start as a research program. Many struggle with effectively communicating with sponsors. All of them are leaders in the field of STEM education. The next section discusses what other nonprofits can learn from these excellent programs.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF i3 GRANTEES

The experiences of VISTA, its i3 peers, and their corporate sponsors offer a number of lessons for STEM partnerships. These lessons are especially revealing to nonprofits, since they need to appeal to corporate sponsors to support their programs. What follows are findings from the research that characterize the top STEM programs.

Characteristics of Top Programs

A strong personnel structure


Many STEM programs begin with a person who is dedicated to improving STEM education. While that is essential to success, strong programs are able to grow beyond

a visionary. Sponsors want to see a clear personnel structure that enables capacity building, program growth, and long-term planning. An experienced upper-level manager in this study was unable to give a complete picture of her program, or suggest its focus, which could be very disconcerting for potential sponsors. In addition to development directors who help with corporate outreach, some programs employ subject matter experts, personnel managers, and individuals who liaise with school district officials to complement the work of the on-the-ground staff.

Relationships with existing institutions

Many corporate respondents put a high





value on a STEM nonprofit having a significant working relationship with a school or school district. It serves as a significant validation and opens the STEM programs to broader networks. Programs affiliated with a university were also regarded highly by corporate partners.

By plugging into existing educational structures, nonprofits were able to go beyond their specific STEM educational goals to improve other aspects of a student's educational experience. Several programs tailored their outcomes so that they prepared students for Advanced Placement examinations. One program ensured that teachers received credit hours as part of their STEM training. A key differentiator of good programs is that they ensure their achievements plug into existing structures so that teachers, students, and the community receive maximum benefits.

Opportunities for corporate partners

Sponsor support comes in a number of forms. Some sponsors may be better able to offer in-kind materials, others, funding for a specific part of a program, and others, skills-based volunteers.

Successful programs outline different options for partnership. A nonprofit respondent mentioned that corporations want to direct their investments to educational outcomes (e.g., the number of students served). Nonprofits may benefit by offering donors the option to directly fund specific outcomes, rather than fund the general program. Moreover, it can benefit a nonprofit to phrase its funding requests in terms of an educational outcome (e.g. the cost per student enrolled in a program), while incorporating overhead into this number.

How Top Programs Communicate With Potential Partners

Marketing strategy

Successful nonprofits develop a succinct, but complete, pitch of their program

to explain its goals, focus, targets, and successes. Many STEM nonprofits are doing great work but do not have the time and internal resources to put together strong marketing material. In interviews, some nonprofit respondents struggled to explain their program to CCC (none of them had won an i3 grant). Websites for many STEM programs can be difficult to find. For example, one of the i3 programs had a descriptive website, but it was difficult to find it within its parent organization's website. The most successful nonprofits had attractive, concise materials describing their program, and their staff could offer a polished description of their programs.

Accessible language

Developing language and materials accessible to the public and businesses can go a long way toward ensuring that a STEM program reaches its full potential. A popular way to create business-ready material is to create a strategic plan and logic model for the organization. This enables a quick overview of the program. One of the i3 programs created an easy-to-understand presentation that included its goals, scientific support, and a simplified version of its logic model that it disseminated to the public.

Leading STEM programs take measures to make their descriptions and findings easy for laymen to understand. Some use infographics or well-honed publicity statements in an easily understood format about student improvement. In particular, these programs listen to corporate partners, often through corporate relations professionals, to ensure that they are effectively communicating their programs.

How Top Programs Communicate With Current Partners

Measurable outcomes

Top nonprofits produce evidence in different forms that their program works. Some show how student scores improve, while others gauge student involvement in STEM fields.

When it comes to measuring outcomes, the more quantitative the proof the better. But do not undervalue the importance of compelling anecdotal evidence to put a face on quantitative data.

Evaluate plans

The best STEM programs are responsive to improving their programs. They create an evaluation plan, which is a standard expectation for many state and federal grants. Also, they are able to explain changes made as a result of evaluations. The gold standard of evaluation is showing independently verified, statistical proof of improvements in learning. However, many STEM programs lack the resources to bring in independent third-party evaluators to conduct this work. While testing of that magnitude is not possible for many STEM programs, the closer they can get, the better they can make the case for corporate support.

What Nonprofits Can Do to Emulate Top Programs

Bring in professionals

Often, nonprofit programs concentrate on great implementers, but many need help finding great managers. Securing professionals, including volunteers, who can manage the program's outreach to the public and sponsors, can make a considerable difference. While VISTA was made possible by Dr. Sterling, it was their new Director of Development, Rob Johnson, who served a key role in showing potential corporate sponsors the advantages of the program.

Creating a communications strategy

Every nonprofit can develop an accessible message for the public. Developing a

website is inexpensive and a great way to put forward a brand, show results, provide evidence of outcomes, and advertise sponsorship support. These points may help ease a potential supporter who is wary of being an early sponsor. Well-managed social media is also a relatively easy way to advertise and show the permanence of the program. Social media may serve multiple purposes by reaching out to the community, corporate partners, and the students the program is designed to help.

Use scientific support to back up the program

Perhaps the clearest lesson that the top STEM programs can give is that they build their programs based on the strength of scientific data and program evaluation. VISTA evolved as a result of smaller programs and trials that used scientific evidence to show exactly where there was potential to make the greatest advances.

When a STEM program outlines how its program makes improvements in STEM education, it needs to support it with scientific evaluations of the nonprofit's positive impact. If this kind of evaluation seems hard to achieve, consider reaching out to local universities. Many of the i3-awarded nonprofits grew from research programs that demonstrated success with exacting detail. An academic researcher interested in education may use your program as an experiment for validating STEM education methods.

Pursuing these goals will strengthen a nonprofit organization, make it more prepared to make strong partnerships with corporate partners, and make it easier for those partners to determine the impact created by their investment.

For more information about the qualities of successful STEM programs and their sponsors, see Appendix III—Strategies for STEM Nonprofits and Their Corporate Sponsors.

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Return on investment (ROI) assesses the financial returns a company receives per dollar invested in an initiative. The concept is traditionally applied to capital improvements to gauge how much revenues increase (or costs are reduced) per dollar invested in an improvement. When considering future opportunities, a company can gauge the returns from these investments against other possibilities with different rates of return.

Social return on investment (SROI) applies this concept to corporate responsibility. Money is invested in initiatives, then social and environmental outputs are created, and finally the results are measured against expectations. In an ideal world, one could gauge the comparative effectiveness of these investments against other social and environmental opportunities, as with traditional ROI.

Historically, SROI has been elusive. Unlike the traditional concept, social impacts do not easily translate into dollars. Unlike capital improvements, with social investments it is less evident how one translates outputs like education scores, BMI reductions, and planted trees into a common currency. Lacking one currency of impact, it is hard to say whether an investor got more or less impact for their money when they invested in divergent social and environmental initiatives.

Another historic problem with SROI is measuring impact – social and environmental improvements can be hard to quantify. Because social and environmental improvements are hard to measure, corporate professionals often make donations based on imperfect information. This is where studying i3 recipients can help. The i3 recipients are more than great STEM programs; they're cases of nonprofits with best-in-class measurement of their social impact.



The i3 grantees afford us a rare glimpse into what happens when you can meticulously measure social impact. Does that mean SROI can now be achieved? One of the interesting findings from this research is that there are hurdles to overcome after measurement is accounted for. Mainly, the remaining issues come down to the relationship between a company and its nonprofit partners. How does information about impact get back to corporate partners once it is measured? How do companies use the information they receive about their social investments? In conversations with both sides of the donor relationship, CCC discovered several key findings about determining SROI.

Reporting Impact

How does a corporate partner learn about the effectiveness of a nonprofit's work?

Most said that their company mandated that formal reports must be filled out by all grantees. However, many dismissed that this was the primary information channel they used to check a nonprofit's progress. Only one respondent said that her company strongly leaned on the information reported back through formal grant reports.

Corporate responsibility professionals principally reported getting their information through informal conversations with nonprofit staff. Many stressed other informal channels, like site visits and discussions with teachers and students involved with the nonprofit program.

The nonprofit respondents echoed the same sentiment. They said that every corporate partner was unique, and that each one learned about the program differently. They generally reported that their corporate contacts wanted informal check-ins to hear about the program as opposed to formal reports. Several nonprofit respondents said that site visits were their favorite means of communicating impact to sponsors, although they also admitted that it was difficult to make this happen.

These conversations indicate that informal communications trump formal communication channels. This is not necessarily bad—informal conversations can transmit nuanced understandings of a program's impact. One limitation of this method, however, is that it can make a quantitative evaluation of SROI difficult.


Data Translation

The i3 programs begin to analyze data about their effectiveness as soon as that data becomes available. Data analysis includes statistical techniques like regressions, t-tests, ANOVAs, and other forms of modeling. These tests examine whether, and how, students are learning better in the intervention groups versus the control ones. What should a company do with this information?

While all corporate respondents mentioned the desire for nonprofit partners to produce results, few have the technical background to process usable information from randomized control trials. Few nonprofit partners can produce this level of measurement, and this is beyond the traditional skills of business executives. This means that there is a gap in understanding impact, when it is measured to its fullest scientific extent.

CCC asked the corporate respondents how they planned to learn about the results of the i3 experiments. Most answered that they would rely on the nonprofits to communicate outcomes during conversations, especially at yearly check-ins. Based on these conversations, a corporate sponsor may gauge whether the nonprofit made a net positive difference. But, without specific numbers on performance, it would be difficult to take this information and produce a measure of SROI. Even if specific numbers are given, it is not always easy to compare these with the outputs of similar programs.

When corporate respondents were asked what they were looking for in terms of measured impact, most confirmed that



their primary concern was with making a positive difference, without a clear goal for its size or nature. For instance, one respondent articulated a clear set of goals for her company's donations. She wanted students to take more science classes and more teachers staying in the field. Yet when asked what kind of measured impact she wanted, she was looking "to see test scores increased" (without concern for how much), and frankly shared that her method for evaluating success was mostly "anecdotal and feel good."

It appears that some kind of "data translation" service is missing in the case of the i3 nonprofits. Such a service would translate the results of regression tables into a format that the business community could digest and compare easily against other social investments. If this standard is reached, it becomes possible to see differing levels of success per dollar spent—the ultimate goal stated by corporate responsibility professionals. The path toward this translation is unclear. Yet it can be done, "Measuring Success: 3M and St. Paul Public Schools" is an example of one company that managed to do just this (see inset box).

Data translation can take many forms. It can take the form of an online tool, or a report generated by a "social impact analyst" whose job would be to compare company social investments. Nonetheless, some translation service must exist if corporate giving is to reach the goal of SROI. After conversations with both corporate and nonprofit respondents, it seems clear that nonprofits do not have the capacity to provide data translation services. It is unclear then whether data translation should be embedded as a position within companies, as a service of business associations, or in contracts with consulting firms.

Publicizing Impact

When a company invests heavily in a corporate responsibility initiative, it is not always looking to get public credit. For

instance, one respondent explicitly said that she did not care about the credit that may follow from publicizing her company's work; she was interested only in "doing good." Also, in the case of VISTA, some donors were interested in signaling their commitment to state-level stakeholders – such a commitment does not need to be broadcast to the general public.

Yet there is potential value in having the public see a company's philanthropic work, especially once its impact has been definitively proven, as is possible with the i3 grants. If a company wants to broadcast the impact of its investment, how does it go about doing so? To address this question, CCC analyzed four i3 grant awardees and the 26 corporations listed as their sponsors. The websites, newsfeeds, and corporate responsibility reports of the 26 sponsors were scanned to find publicity mentioning donations to i3 programs.

Interestingly, only 10 of the 26 companies released any public mention of their donations. Notably, all 10 mentions focused on announcing the company's donation, and none focused on the impact that directly resulted from those donations.

These numbers could reflect that few of the companies studied want to publicize the efforts of their corporate responsibility work. They may also reflect that there is a gap in communication strategy, and consequently the good work of the companies is being lost on the public. Conversations with corporate respondents suggest that the latter is the case, at least partially.

For instance, one respondent said that she thought it was the job of the nonprofit to announce the donation, because the company is wary of "pounding [its] chest." Yet the nonprofit her company donated to did not have the capacity to do a major communications release. Another respondent mentioned that her company released a press statement, because it is

MEASURING SUCCESS: 3M AND ST. PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In 2012, the board of 3Mgives (3M's corporate foundation) had a specific question for Barbara Kaufmann: How do you know that 3M's partnership with the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) is working? Barbara is the Manager of Education Giving, and has worked with SPPS for many years. Previously, she had told the board compelling anecdotes about individual initiatives. Now the board wanted a detailed picture of 3M's overall impact.

As Barbara looked for a solution, she heard from 3M's Sustainability group about a measurement tool created by the London Benchmarking Group (LBG). Her team decided to try it out on two of 3M's corporate responsibility initiatives; one with SPPS and one with the University of Minnesota.

Barbara describes the tool as "an Excel spreadsheet on steroids." She inputs "everything [she knows] about 3M's investments." Then Holly Miller, the program evaluator at SPPS, enters in the outputs of her program. The tool then generates figures and reports connecting the inputs to the outputs.

Barbara and her SPPS counterparts spoke very positively about the LBG tool. Barbara said that it helps her create a "great pictorial or elevator speech." Holly said that it "translates school speak . . . into a common language." Holly also said that the tool is flexible—enabling her to enter specific information she believes "3M needs to know." Marty Davis, a Science Program Manager for SPPS, said that the "London Benchmarking Group [tool] puts measures on things that cannot be measured easily." He also said that the tool allowed them to include more measures of success than student test scores, and that it "allows us to pull those together in a cohesive way."

Even more impressive is what they said about how the tool was improving their partnership. For instance, Barbara said that they were immediately able to ask, "Is there anything we should not fund?" In fact, they realized that one part of the program was not as effective, and that "we had a higher return on other investments in that portfolio."

The case of 3M and SPPS reveals interesting findings. First, translating data on performance into common language brought immediate value. Both sides of the partnership are able to see the pieces of the program that are working. Putting educational outputs into one framework enables 3M to compare outcomes in different school systems across the globe. Also, Barbara noted that 3M has already seen value from quantifying its impact. The company has increased its standing in several rankings and reports. What's more, she says she can now expand her discussions beyond donations. She can tell the story of "impact, results, and betterment, and not just dollar signs."

A second finding is that this successful partnership resulted from a different kind of attitude toward corporate giving. As Marty noted, "Barbara's commitment to long-term funding and support is instrumental to even use a tool like this." With a 40-year partnership with SPPS, 3M is clearly committed to a long-term relationship. The implementation of the LBG tool was a result of this extended commitment, combined with a commitment to rigorous evaluation. This is a true partnership, where 3M wants to measure the impact of their donations, and where the school system offers "a more complete picture and what measures are best in painting this picture."

In the case of 3M and SPPS, the dialogue has already changed from "making a difference" to "returns on investment." As nonprofits increase the sophistication of their measurement, and as corporations increasingly want to see the global returns on their financial support, more partnerships will look like this one. This case shows that data translation is already happening, and demonstrates how it will improve the effectiveness of partnerships in the future.

a policy of the company to do so when a donation goes beyond a certain limit. She did not mention that this was an intentional strategy on the part of her team. A third respondent was quite frank. She said that her corporation had “not, in the past, done a good job with publicizing.” She said that her company previously “thought the work spoke for itself” and yet “people don’t know it – our employees don’t know it.” She said that her company was “on a journey” and was now “doing a 180” to be more upfront with the public.

Just as there is a gap in relaying findings back to corporate sponsors, there appears

to be a gap in transmitting findings to the general public. While some companies intentionally avoid publicizing their donations, others may be missing an opportunity to communicate their good work because a plan is not in place between the corporation and the nonprofit to publicize it. The lack of any public release mentioning results seems like a missed chance to show the value of a company’s donation. The more that leading companies promote the impact of their nonprofit partnerships, the more that other companies will feel the charge to contribute to strong initiatives, and the public will appreciate the positive role of business in their lives.



CONCLUSION

This report examined partnerships between corporations and STEM nonprofits and identified several ways to improve those relationships.

First, nonprofits need to professionalize to the greatest extent possible. The STEM nonprofits in this study implemented their programs well, but often struggled with describing their programs and impact. At a minimum, nonprofits should strive to succinctly present their programs, have an attractive and intuitive website, and have a visual model describing how the program works.

Second, it seems that there are options for partnering with corporations that are underused. Corporations can engage with a nonprofit beyond writing a check. Nonprofits should consider integrating more options for corporations to be involved if they want to draw in more sponsors. In this study, for instance, corporations engaged STEM nonprofits by serving on advisory boards, contributing skills-based volunteers, donating money, and as serving as communication partners.

Third, corporate professionals predominately rely on informal communications channels to learn about the impact their nonprofit partners are making. Nonprofit and corporate respondents both said that informal check-ins, as opposed to formal reports, were the main source of communication. This method of communication can offer nuanced understandings of impact, but it can also make it difficult to assess a quantifiable measure of it.

Fourth, it is difficult for the business community to interpret the scientific measurement of a nonprofit's social impact. As nonprofits strive to improve measurement of their social impact, there will be an increasing need for services that translate scientific evidence into information

businesses can use.⁵ It is uncertain who will execute this “data translation” service, whether it should be the responsibility of the nonprofit, the corporate partner, or some third party facilitator.

Finally, this study found that corporate and nonprofit partnerships may be underpublicized. Out of the 26 corporations sponsoring four i3 grantees, CCC found that 10 of them released a public statement announcing their partnership. All 10 statements announced a corporation's donation, and none mentioned the impact resulting from the donation. It appears that corporations are missing an opportunity to communicate the value of their donations to the public.


Next Steps

These findings reveal possible areas where corporate and nonprofit partnerships could be improved. The question now is: How does the business community make progress to improve these gaps? Based on this research, the following are ideas for moving forward and questions that should be answered.

An Investment Mindset

Most corporations today have a more strategic plan regarding their philanthropy than they had in the past. However, evidence from this report suggests that partnerships still have room to become even more strategic. Even if the goal is to “do good,” rather than to receive any material benefit for a company, there is room for making partnerships more effective. Metaphors borrowed from finance and investment may improve partnerships, especially if measuring SROI is the ultimate goal of corporate responsibility professionals.

For instance, when a company invests in a capital improvement, it goes through a particular process. It thoroughly assesses



the needs of internal departments, vets existing providers and their proposals, works with a select provider to implement the capital improvement, and then rigorously measures the return on its investment and compares this with expectations. Parts of this process are happening with nonprofit partnerships. Most of the corporate respondents mentioned a thorough vetting process when selecting a nonprofit partner, many worked with the nonprofits to better their programs, and some reviewed the quantitative results from their nonprofit investments. Other parts of this process look less like the traditional investment process. Less attention, in particular, seems to be paid to the direct outputs or results of social investments; precisely the time when impact should be measured, evaluated against expectations, and publicized.

Another useful financial metaphor relates to the ecology of the investment community. In traditional finance, there are a variety of investment actors with particular roles. There are seed funders, venture capitalists, hedge funds, and investment trusts. These various roles offer options for how, how much, and when potential investors can invest in a given enterprise. One of the respondents from this study spoke of her company's donation along the lines of seed funding. Her company gives smaller loans to new initiatives that show promise, but which entail higher risk that they will not succeed. Thinking along these lines enables companies to consider their best role in the ecology of social investments.

Similarly, financial analysts assist the financial community by providing the information system that investors use to



assess companies' value. This information translates the cacophony of information that exists about companies and pares it down to a summary that can be compared with other investments. This service is directly related to data translation.

Who provides data translation

As nonprofits are increasingly pressured to measure their impact, the sophistication of their results will grow. Who will translate these scientific findings into plain English? It appears from this research that many nonprofits do not have the capacity to add this to their mission at this time. Other actors must serve this function.

The service may live as a job in large companies. Just as companies have internal analysts assessing their business investments, they may have one or more analysts analyzing the returns from their social investments. Trade associations may be another place where this service can live. If it is onerous for a company to support its own analysts, it may make sense for companies to pool their resources in trade associations that will provide this service at an industry level. Finally, another natural solution is for this to become a robust offering of consultants. Consulting firms, both large and specialized, could provide tools for translating data on nonprofit impact into valuations that executives can interpret.

Convene to Discuss Partnerships

Companies should convene internally to discuss how to revise their expectations of nonprofits. Here are important questions from this report that can guide these conversations.

- How can we fully use reports received from our nonprofit partners? Are we measuring their success relative to other nonprofits? What is our strategy for combining disparate information about

nonprofit effectiveness into a common framework of evaluation?

- Are we communicating the impact from our donations as much as we would like? Are we communicating in the ways we want? Is it well established in every partnership whose job it is to promote the relationship?
- What is our strategy for social investment? Do we want to invest early in new initiatives, or later in established ones? What is our role in the ecology of social investment?
- Can we ask more of our nonprofit partners? Do they have logic models explaining their process? Is evaluation built into their programs?
- Can we help our nonprofit partners more? Are there ways for us to be involved beyond writing a check? Would our employees like to be involved in the nonprofit's work?
- Should we communicate differently with our nonprofit partners? Is our current process going to get us the information we need to maximize our investments?

Companies should also meet with one another to ask how they can improve partnerships together.

- Are we sponsoring the same nonprofits? If so, how can we streamline their reporting to us? If we are all investors, then how can we share information about the returns on our investments?
- Where should data translation live? Should it live within each company, within associations, within consulting firms, or somewhere else?

Answering these questions will make nonprofit relationships more effective. Ultimately, that will yield more business value and solve persistent social and environmental issues.

APPENDIX I—METHODOLOGY

What is STEM?

STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. The term generally refers to either careers or curriculum based on these subjects. The broadest definition of what counts as a STEM career or education comes from the federal government through the National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF recognizes 11 STEM fields: Chemistry, Computer and Informational Science and Engineering, Engineering, Geosciences, Life Sciences, Materials Research, Mathematical Sciences, Physics and Astronomy, Psychology, Social Sciences, and STEM Education.⁶

Often, organizations and companies will adopt a narrower version of STEM, which is why sometimes statistics from different research projects may not line up. Often, Social Sciences, Psychology, and any of the medical-specific Life Sciences are kept out of the definition of STEM careers and fields. This can be an expedient choice for programs focused on improving STEM education to respond to a gap in job preparedness, since many perceive less of a gap in those omitted subfields.⁷

Methods

This project set out to identify what sets the best STEM programs apart, particularly when interacting with their private sponsors. The project had twin goals: to help nonprofits and their business partners build more effective partnerships and to gain insight into improving STEM education.

It appeared that the best way to identify top-level STEM programs was to examine grantees from the Department of Education's \$937 million Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) from 2010 to 2012. The purpose of the i3 is "to provide competitive grants to applicants with a

record of improving student achievement and attainment in order to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices that are demonstrated to have an impact on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates."⁸

I3 grants during the period went to 92 educational programs in a wide array of fields. One of the categories was STEM, which included 10 of the programs. This research also found eight programs in other categories (High Standards and High Quality Assessments, Effective Teachers and Principals, and Rural) that were clearly STEM related. Those 18 programs were awarded \$171 million of the \$937 million, or 18.25% of the i3 fund.

The i3 breaks up applicants into three groups based on where programs are in their evolution. The programs are categorized as "Development," "Validation," and "Scale Up" based on the type of evidence and evaluation they conduct. Development phase programs were most common and received smaller grants (under \$5 million) to make sure that their program was sound. Validation phase programs received medium sized grants (\$5 million to \$25 million) to ensure that proven ideas could work more broadly. Scale Up ideas were the least common (only 1 of the 18 STEM programs was a Scale Up program), largest (more than \$25 million), and were awarded to programs that had broad experience and were ready to be instituted in other areas. This helped the Department of Education set slightly different criteria based on where a program was in its development, and should be viewed as a best practice for businesses when they decide to support a STEM (or any) nonprofit

program.⁹ A categorization like this can help a business determine how to support a new program in relation to an older one.

As is typical with federal grants of this magnitude, STEM program applicants were required to undergo a significant vetting process. Some of the more important criteria that they had to meet were specific full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing, securing outside evaluators, developing a logic model, measuring impact, and securing between 15% and 20% matching funds from the private sector.¹⁰ Rigor of this level is generally unwieldy to implement and is certainly difficult for most STEM programs to match. However, it is a guideline of what can be expected from best-in-class programs.

After the i3 grant programs were identified and analyzed, CCC surveyed a number of STEM programs, including programs that had and had not received i3 grants. Both types were included to get a sense of what characteristics differentiated the two groups. A number of STEM educational programs, including local, regional, and national programs; nonprofit and not-for-profit programs; and programs at different stages of their evolution were contacted. The goal in these conversations was to get a better sense of how the programs operated, what their primary focus was, how they measured success, and how they approached their partnerships with corporate sponsors and partners.

One i3 program, VISTA at George Mason University, was identified to investigate more deeply than the other programs. It was prototypical of many of STEM programs. Additionally, enough rapport was built with this organization for it to permit interviews with all of its corporate sponsors individually.

Finally, interviews were conducted with a number of businesses that support STEM education programs. CCC talked to corporate sponsors for a number of i3 programs, companies who were and were not supporters of CCC, and companies who

managed their own STEM programming in addition to supporting independent STEM education nonprofits. In those conversations, we learned how those companies choose which STEM nonprofits to support, how they promote an ongoing partnership, and what communication methods and styles were important to them.

This research identified top examples of STEM programs, extracted lessons from how the government ranks them, and how to foster better communications and partnership between them. These findings can help STEM nonprofits and their potential and current corporate partners make better decisions on how to build a more effective partnership with one another.



APPENDIX II—SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

Questionnaire for STEM Programs

Brief History of the Project

- What encouraged your organization to begin working on STEM Education? How did your program start?
- What is the professional background of the program leaders? Were any particularly influential in starting the program?

Size/Scale/Scope of Project

- What specific services does your Program provide?
- What is the structure of your Program?
- Where does your program operate?
- Do you have a logic model describing how your interventions work within the education systems where you operate?

- Are there ways you have directed your program to have side benefits above-and-beyond the scope of the i3 grants?

What is the focus or goal of your program and how do you define success?

- What part of the STEM educational issue does your organization address most directly?
- Do you focus on underrepresented or underprivileged groups?
- What is your “utopia”? How will students, teachers, or administrators have changed if your intervention is fully successful?

How did you develop a relationship with your private sector partners and sponsors?

- How did your relationships begin? How did you reach out to sponsors?



- What information do you report to them? How do you present that information?
- Why do you think the organization was interested in supporting your work? Was there a person who took a particular interest in your project?
- What is the most effective way to communicate to your partners and sponsors? What is your favorite way for them to see your impact?
- What would you change about your relationship with corporate sponsors?
- Is there something you would like to tell the business community interested in the topic of STEM?
- Are your partners directly involved in the project? Do they contribute volunteers or sit on advisory councils?

Evaluation

- How do you perform evaluations of your work?
- Do you have internal research that is separate from the third party evaluations mandated by the i3 grant rules?

What does the business community need to know about STEM programming so it can make intelligent decisions when they give STEM non-profits resources?

Questionnaire for Partner Companies

How does the company approach working with nonprofits?

- Is there a focus to your outreach
 - Geographic?
 - Thematic?
 - Specific populations?
- Are the resources being handled directly by the corporation or a foundation? What is the relationship between the two?

History of partnership with the STEM organization

- How did you first get involved with the STEM nonprofit? What set it apart from other STEM nonprofits you had experience with?
- How are you currently involved with the STEM nonprofit?

Communicating with the STEM organization

- Do your employees work with the organization?
- Are upper management personnel involved with the organization?
- What communications do you receive from the organization?
- What is the most effective way for you to communicate with the STEM organization?

Building a partnership with the STEM organization

- Who is your point of contact at the STEM organization?
- How do you help the organization grow?
- How do you work with and cooperate with other sponsors?

Corporate Citizenship Goals

- How does your partnership with the STEM nonprofit help you reach your Corporate Citizenship Goals?
- How do you advertise or showcase your partnership?

What should all STEM organizations know when it comes to working with sponsors and partners in the private sector?

What would you change about your partnership with the STEM organization?

APPENDIX III—STRATEGIES FOR STEM NONPROFITS AND THEIR CORPORATE SPONSORS

WHAT CAN ALL STEM K-12 EDUCATION NONPROFITS TAKE AWAY FROM THE TOP 13 GRANTEES?	
Program Characteristics	Lessons
Ensuring a Strong Personnel Structure	While visionaries are important, sponsors want to see a clear personnel structure that enables more capacity building, program growth, and long-term planning.
Working with Schools	When dealing with current or potential sponsors, highlight the work you do in the schools or with teachers. Many of the companies we talked to put a high value on a STEM nonprofit having a significant working relationship with a school or school district. It serves as an important validation and opens the STEM programs to broader networks. Working with schools also allows great opportunities to multiple benefits, such as increasing student scores and offering better preparation for advanced exams.
Providing Opportunities for Support	Some sponsors may be better able to offer in-kind support of materials; others may offer funding for a specific part of a program. Many sponsors will want employees at all levels to get directly involved with the program.
Marketing	Develop a succinct, but complete, pitch of your nonprofit that is accessible to the public. Include the program's focus, target, and goals. Developing a website is an inexpensive and great first step to put forward a brand, show results, provide evidence of outcomes, and advertise sponsorship support. Well-managed social media is also a relatively easy way to advertise and show the permanence of the program. Having these materials makes approaching potential sponsors considerably easier.
Communicating with Partners	An important way to build support is to create a business-savvy method to frame your "sell." One way to accomplish this through a strategic plan and logic model for the program. Outline how the program uses its resources to grow and make improvements in STEM education. These materials enable potential and current sponsors to take a look "under the hood" of the program to secure a lot of information quickly.
Measuring Outcomes	Show evidence that your program works by illustrating student improvement or increased excitement in STEM fields. The more quantitative proof you can produce, the better, but do not undervalue the importance of compelling anecdotal evidence to put a face on that data.
Evaluating	Many STEM programs may be unable to bring in independent evaluators, but it is necessary to create an evaluation plan and show how you implement it, along with results and changes that you have made as a result of the evaluation.

WHAT CAN POTENTIAL STEM CORPORATE SPONSORS LEARN?

Partnership Characteristics	Lessons
Advertising your Partnership	<p>Advertise and showcase your support of the STEM program. Strong encouragement from current partners makes it more likely that other companies will support and partner with the program. Nonprofits experience significant boosts from the legitimization and validation that outward support from current sponsors offers.</p>
Managing your Nonprofit Partnerships	<p>Measure the impact and outputs of your partnerships. Encourage your nonprofit partners to perform evaluations of their program and produce guiding tools such as logic models. Use these to help track the effectiveness of your giving.</p>
	<p>Communicate with your nonprofit partners often; informal conversations are a primary way to learn how the program is doing. Ask for quantitative data where available. Ask your nonprofits how you can help them more.</p>
	<p>Establish your company's system for how it invests in nonprofit partners. Is your company interested in offering small amounts of funding to a large number of startup programs, a large amount of funding to a small number of established programs, or consistent funding over time? Find nonprofit partners that fit your company's criteria.</p>

WHAT CAN CORPORATE SPONSORS EXPECT FROM THEIR STEM NONPROFIT PARTNERS

Partner Characteristics	Expectations
Evaluation Procedures	A STEM nonprofit should be able to show proof that its program works the way that it says it does. A potential partner should be able to cite significant evidence that the way it approaches the STEM education problem is an effective one for their community or the partner's focus. The best evidence comes from rigorous, third-party verified sources.
	A program should be able to clearly explain how it made changes to its program in the past in response to self-evaluations. If it encounters a problem it did not anticipate, how will it know there is a problem? How would it fix it?
Guiding Materials	A STEM program should be able to succinctly outline what it is trying to accomplish and where it is trying to do it. It should be able to describe any focus toward a certain population, and make a claim that it is uniquely qualified to perform those duties well. By using a logic model or some other device, a STEM program should be able to show how its system will use the resources and inputs that its partners provide in an effective way to produce specific outputs to influence certain outcomes.
Presence	A program should have a public presence through social media and a website. A website serves as the public face for nonprofit programs, so STEM programs need to have a well-designed one to help explain its goals and models. A website can also offer good marketing and media.

WORKS CITED

1. For what classifies as “STEM,” see **Appendix I - Methodology** in this report.
2. In this report, the terms “partner” and “sponsor” are largely interchangeable, though generally the term “partner” refers to the relationship between a nonprofit and corporation, and the term “sponsor” is primarily used to discuss funding specifically.
3. Additionally, VISTA focuses on building statewide infrastructure through professional development of science education leadership. Also, it is establishing an infrastructure to support the collaboration of science education faculty statewide through a five-day Science Education Faculty Academy.
4. For elementary school teachers in the control group, after one year in the program they are moved to the treatment group. After their time in the control group, secondary school teachers receive additional curriculum resources to help their teaching.
5. Nonprofits are likely to face increased pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness. A survey from Global Impact found that when establishing a partnership with a nonprofit, corporations valued effectiveness in producing results nearly three times more than accountability, and four times more than reputation. Global Impact, “Giving Beyond Borders: A Study of Global Giving by U.S. Corporations”
6. National Science Foundation Fields of Study. <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2012/nsf12599/nsf12599.htm#appendix>
7. National Science Board. Science and Engineering Indicators 2012. Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation (NSB 12-01) (2012). <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind12/pdfstart.htm>. Chapter 2.
8. Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund, “Purpose” <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/innovation/index.html#program>
9. The i3 also makes available a ranked order of all programs, along with a small number of high scoring programs that did not quite make the cut for funding. This allowed us to get a sense of what was most important to the grant evaluators.
10. A logic model is a graphical interpretation of how a program will use its resources to have an impact on a specific problem. Generally, they include Inputs (the actual resources being put into the program), Activities (what those resources will do), Outputs (what those activities will produce), and Outcomes (changes brought about by that production).

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Jeff Lundy joined the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Corporate Citizenship Center in February 2012 to oversee and advance its research agenda. Lundy works with the Foundation's network of companies to create their Business for Good Map presence. He also manages the Foundation's thematic maps (e.g. disaster aid, environmental innovation). Jeff also manages analysis and reporting on a broad range of issues on corporate citizenship.

Previously, Lundy served as a consultant for Empower Partners LLC, a social enterprise developing marketing models to help underserved inner-city businesses tailor their product lines to local consumers. Before that, he was an intern at the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), where he selected new technologies to improve BLS's capture of respondent data.

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In addition to his work with the Foundation, Bowdish is a Professor for the American Military University. Previously, he was a managing editor for the history journal "Origins," where he worked with authors who used history to illustrate current events. He also worked as a consultant for county health departments that were instituting public health initiatives in the state of Florida. There, he developed curriculum, wrote grant proposals, and organized health program trainings.

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